

PRESS RELEASE

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**Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union
on the local elections in Equatorial Guinea**

The European Union welcomes confirmation of the date for the forthcoming local elections, to be held in Equatorial Guinea on 28 May 2000.

The European Union is convinced that the local elections are one of the crucial factors in the country's democratisation process and considers that constructive dialogue between the government and all political forces in Equatorial Guinea is the only way to promote that process, which is a fundamental condition for political, economic and social development in Equatorial Guinea as well as for the positive development of its external relations.

In the light of the protests during the last round of elections, the European Union will be closely monitoring the course of the forthcoming elections and would express its concern for the neutrality and impartiality of the electoral observation mechanism which the government intends to set up to that end.

The European Union calls on the government to respect human rights and, in particular, to guarantee the right to vote and the freedom of movement, assembly and speech of the people and of all opposition parties.

The European Union encourages the government to organise the vote under acceptable conditions in terms of transparency and the exercise of fundamental freedoms, this vote being an opportunity for the government to show the international community its effective determination to engage in the process of democratisation and consolidation of the rule of law.

The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union, the associated countries Cyprus, Malta and Turkey, and the EFTA countries, members of the European Economic Area align themselves with this declaration.

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8065/00 (Presse 134 - G)

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